

THE FIGHT'S FAR FROM OVER

AIRMEN DO
THEIR PART TO
KEEP IRAQ AND
AFGHANISTAN
FREE

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The job Senior Airman Klarissa Strick does in Iraq is important. She's sure of that.

But she has no time to wonder how what she does fits into the overall coalition effort in Operation Iraqi Freedom. She's too busy with command and control duties at Baghdad International Airport. Gathering and passing on information. Keeping bosses

informed of aircraft movements, unexploded ordnance discoveries and attacks on nearby bases. Fixing problems.

Airman Strick was nervous when she deployed from Ramstein Air Base, Germany, to join the 447th Air Expeditionary Group at the airport. The 120-day tour of duty is her first deployment. But she soon got used to

Airmen in Iraq are doing a host of jobs they once didn't do. This Air Force pararescueman — from the 64th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron, Balad Air Base, Iraq — secures a building.

the routine. And she quickly learned who her most important customers were: Marines and Soldiers bearing the brunt of the battle to secure Iraq.

"They have a lot of things to do and worry about," she said. "If we can help, in any way, it takes some of the pressure off them."

Doing her job well gives the Airman a strong feeling of accomplishment. And, for the time being, doing the best she can is all that matters to her.

She's not alone. There are some 140,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, U.S. Central Command said. About another 18,000 are busy with Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. They'll remain until the fledgling Iraqi and Afghan militaries can defend their own countries. Until then, the fight continues in the battle to win the global war on terrorism.

These will be "long struggles," said Gen. Richard M. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, during a

Staff Sgt. Fred Cowell uses a high-pressure washer to blast snow from a satellite dish at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. The sergeant deployed to the 455th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron's vehicle maintenance branch.

courtesy photo



lecture in Hutchinson, Kan. That's the nature of campaigns against insurgents.

Still, the coalition effort is bearing fruit. Iraq and Afghanistan are free and the people in both countries freely elected democratic governments for the first time after decades of oppression. The Iraqi and Afghan people's willingness to risk death to be free was a kick in the gut to al Qaeda terrorists and Iraqi insurgents.

The score stands: Democracy 2, Bad Guys 0.

Still, the global war on terrorism is far from over. Each day, coalition forces face threats. They cope with improvised explosive devices detonated by insurgents in Iraq. And they undergo attacks by al Qaeda terrorist groups and remnants of the former Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

But wherever in the world they are, "young men and women, wearing our country's uniform, are engaged in the hard work of history," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said during a budget testimony to the Senate House Armed Services Committee in February.

"Their dedication is inspiring," he said. "We thank them for their valor and their sacrifice."

Some 20,000 of those troops are Airmen — serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, Southwest Asia and the Horn of Africa. Their mission: be the long-reaching air arm of U.S. Central Command. With a myriad of aircraft, U.S. Central Command Air Forces provide a host of services, including close air support, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, airlift and aerial refueling.

Together with other coalition forces, this air arm tracks down and kills terrorists from Iraq to Afghanistan. There are Airmen at six air expeditionary wings, seven air expeditionary groups and several other locations on the hunt. Each day, aircraft take off on their missions, racking up thousands of sorties since the start of the operations.

The numbers are staggering. In Operation Iraqi Freedom, the daily average is 40 to 50 strike sorties and 20 intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance sorties, according to U.S. Central Command Air Forces officials. In Afghanistan,



After securing a building in an abandoned site in Baghdad, an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter extracts pararescuemen from the 64th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron, Balad Air Base, Iraq.

Staff Sgt. Sharon A. Cuerno

the averages are less, with 20 daily strike sorties and 10 intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance sorties.

Not to be left behind, C-130 Hercules transports fly some 130 daily missions in the theater, and deliver more than 3,000 passengers and from 400 to 500 short tons of cargo. Because “Herks” are transporting cargo into smaller and more austere airfields, there are fewer ground convoys, and servicemembers, exposed to insurgent ambushes. High overhead, tankers fly from 30 to 40 sorties, dispensing about 2 million pounds of fuel.

This air power, combined with land and sea operations, brings an enormous amount of pressure to bear on extremists in the region, and around the globe, Secretary Rumsfeld told the Senate committee.

And the war on terrorism “is all about [eliminating] extremism,” General Myers told the World Af-

Airmen in Afghanistan are still fighting al Qaeda and Taliban remnants.

At Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, Staff Sgt. Franklin Newbery (left) shows Col. Derrick Hoxie III how to take oil and fluid samples from an A-10 Thunderbolt II. The sergeant, a crew chief, is with the 455th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron. The colonel is the Combined Joint Task Force-76 deputy commander.

Staff Sgt. Jennifer Lindsey



fairs Council in Los Angeles in February. Because “a victory for extremism in Iraq would have catastrophic implications not only for Iraq, but the region, the Middle East peace process and the world.”

But keeping the new democracies free will continue to require U.S. forces until their militaries can take more responsibility for their country’s defense. As this is happening, the U.S. military is “seeing historic changes,” the defense secretary said. At the same time, NATO is transitioning, and more willing to deploy forces outside of Europe. And across the globe, more than 60 nations are working to stop the proliferation of dangerous weapons.

“These issues will no doubt require the focus of U.S. security policies in the years to come,” Secretary Rumsfeld said.

After a month in Baghdad, Airman Strick learned the ropes of life in the armed camp she calls home. She coped with tent city life and the lack of just about every amenity she’d ever known. And when she called home, she could hear the fear in her parents’ voices.

But the Airman doesn’t have the time or luxury to ponder all the world and Air Force events that — when added together — helped send her to Baghdad. All she wants to do is get up each morning, “go to work, and kick butt.” And with a ton of work to do, she still hasn’t found the urgency to grasp her role in “that whole war on terrorism thing.”

“But down the line — five or 10 years from now — when I look back at what I did here, I’ll know I made a difference to somebody in Iraq,” Airman Strick said. “That’s a great feeling.”

— Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service contributed to this report.

Airman 1st Class Brian Corso (above) keeps an eye on the perimeter of a base in Southwest Asia. A security forces troop, he’s with Viper Flight, whose 30 Airmen provide the base 24-hour protection. The flight is part of the 386th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron. At Karshi-Khanabad Air Base, Uzbekistan (right) C-130 Hercules transports haul cargo to a host of bases to support Operation Enduring Freedom.

Senior Airman Nicole Spence



Tech. Sgt. Scott T. Sturkol

